



Nina Honemond Clarke

(1917-)

Author, community activist, educator, historian, principal and teacher, Montgomery County Public School system. First African-American supervisory resource teacher in the integrated county school system

Nina Clarke was born in Poolesville, Maryland in 1917. She was the seventh of ten surviving brothers and sisters. Granddaughter of slaves, Clarke grew up on a farm where the family raised its own food. Clarke's family has lived in Montgomery County for seven generations. Her father was a farm hand and her mother was a maid. Clarke was educated in a segregated county public school system. She remembers walking with her sisters four to ten miles to attend a two-room school house, while white children were transported by

the county bus, a horse drawn wagon. The county did not provide school transportation for African-American children until the 1940s.

After graduating from Rockville Colored High School in 1934, Clarke attended Bowie State College and received an advanced first grade teaching certificate in 1937. She was one of only two children in her family to attend college. She returned to the county at age 19 and began teaching in several of the local schools for black children. Later, Clarke finished her B.A. degree in elementary education at Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia. In 1952, she earned a Master of Education degree from Boston University. She served as the first African American delegate to the Teachers Association in Montgomery County prior to integration.

Clarke became one of the first African American teachers to teach white children. County schools began to desegregate after the Supreme Court's 1954 decision that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. Referring to other African American teachers, Clarke recalled that they knew that "we had to be twice as good to be even thought of as average." In the first year of teaching at a white school, Clarke recalled that one of her first-grade students told her, "Mrs. Clarke, you're exactly like my mother. The only difference is you have black hair and she has red hair."

In 1962, she was selected by the Board of Education as the first African-American teacher specialist in Reading/Language Arts in Montgomery County. In 1967, she was selected by the principal of Brookhaven Elementary School to be Assistant Principal. In October 1968, Clarke was appointed principal of Aspen Hill Elementary School in Rockville, becoming the second African American woman principal of an integrated school. Clarke remained principal of Aspen Hill until her retirement in 1973, completing 36 years in the Montgomery County Public School system.

After retirement, Clarke started a new career as a historian, author, lecturer and volunteer. She is the author and co-author of several books and articles. She co-authored in 1978 with Lillian Brown, [A History of the Black Public Schools of Montgomery County, Maryland 1872-1961](#). In 1983 she published [History of the 19th Century Black Churches in Maryland and Washington D.C.](#) She also authored [History of Jerusalem United Methodist Church](#). Clarke has been a freelance writer for the Montgomery County

Journal Newspaper, Washington Afro-American Newspaper, and Flower of the Forest Journal of Baltimore. About her interest and passion about researching local African-American history, Clarke told a Montgomery County newspaper, "I want to do it. I want to leave this legacy for blacks to pick up something I wrote. If I can do that, then I know that it's worthwhile."

SOURCES:

- The Montgomery County Historical Society Library
- Lillian Brown and Nina Clarke, *A History of the Black Public Schools of Montgomery County, Maryland 1872–1961*, New York: Vantage Press (1978)
- See Lillian Brown